

Senator Margarita Prentice

2001 SESSION IN REVIEW

Dear Friends,

Summer 2001

The 57th legislative session was one of the most difficult I have ever experienced. We faced an already difficult task of drafting the 2001-03 operating, capital and transportation budgets in the face of extraordinary circumstances. Before session even started, there was a lot less money to work with because of our slowing economy, voter initiatives and escalating medical costs. During session, the urgent need for earthquake, drought and energy crisis relief only added to the strain of an already overburdened process. The 49-49 party tie in the House of Representatives and a one-seat Democratic majority in the Senate did nothing to ease the situation.

During the second special session, the \$22.8 billion operating and capital budgets were passed. And the current law (meaning no future projects) transportation budget was also approved. These bare bones budgets address the most pressing needs of the state.

This newsletter briefly highlights legislation that directly impacts our district. Please contact me on these or other issues of interest so more information can be provided to you. Your comments and concerns are essential to my representing our district, and I appreciate hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Margarita Prentice

Margarita Prentice

State Senator, 11th District

Chair: Labor Commerce & Financial
Institutions Committee

Member: Education Committee and
Transportation Committee

Transportation

Two decades of population and economic growth are major contributors to Puget Sound's transportation crisis. This year, the Legislature passed some of the recommendations of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation.



Transportation permit streamlining. Senate Bill 6188 is landmark legislation because it speeds up the completion of transportation projects and maintains current environmental protections at the same time. Current laws, regulations and ordinances are often in conflict with each other. Because of the delays this creates, I sponsored the permit streamlining bill. "One-stop" environmental permitting for local, regional and statewide transportation projects will cut the permit process in half. It will not only save taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars over time, but also continues to protect and improve air and water quality.

For example, the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) must be completed before any transportation project can begin. Under this new process, a typical four-year EIS statement would become a two-year process, putting the entire project on a faster track.

Budget. The Legislature passed a \$3.4 billion "current law" transportation budget, which means only existing funds are available for our most immediate transportation needs. This means no new construction projects and no new money. Transportation budget details are available by calling the Legislative Hot Line or my office. You can also view the budget documents and summaries on the Senate Transportation Committee Web site: <http://stc.leg.wa.gov/>

2001 SESSION IN REVIEW

How You Can Reach Me

Olympia Office:

419 John A. Cherberg Bldg.
PO Box 40411
Olympia, WA 98504-0411

Direct Line: (360) 786-7616

Toll-Free Legislative

Hot Line: (800) 562-6000 or
(800) 635-9993 (TTY)

E-mail: prentice_ma@leg.wa.gov

On the Web:

www.leg.wa.gov/senate/prentice.htm



safe and improve student learning. Most of these goals were accomplished in several budget items:

- \$85.7 million in the budget to reduce class size (the \$85 million came in addition to the \$393 million from Initiative 728 for smaller classes, professional development, extended learning and full-time kindergarten);
- providing measures designed to attract and keep high-quality teachers; and
- providing \$2.8 million in the budget for the Superintendent of Public Instruction use in assisting struggling schools.

It was very disappointing that the anti-bullying bill did not pass. This bill would have required all schools to adopt a specific policy prohibiting harassment, intimidation or bullying of students. However, we were successful in stopping a very negative bill that would have removed local control and funding for struggling schools. These schools need to be helped - not punished.

Education

This year I requested to be on the Senate Education Committee. Some of my priorities were to support K-12 teachers and staff, develop an accountability plan for public schools, keep schools



Identity Theft

I am very proud of my Sponsorship of Senate Bill 5449 - the identity theft bill. Identity theft has become the nation's top consumer complaint and our state ranks in the top 10 for this

crime. All a thief needs is your Social Security number or other personal information to establish credit in your name. This is easily obtained by simply stealing a purse, wallet or mail.

The identity theft bill was drafted through the extraordinary cooperation of the attorney general, the business community and consumers. It is the toughest such law in the nation and a major victory for consumers. Now a victim can prevent negative credit reports resulting from the crime by sending the police report to the credit reporting agency. Another important provision is that prosecution of the crime takes place in the county **where the victim lives** not the county where any of the crimes took place. This saves the victim travel expenses and time off work to participate in court proceedings. The bill also raises the penalty for the criminals and gives victims a court order to help correct all public records damaged by identity theft.



Senator Prentice and Governor Locke exchange congratulations at identity theft bill-signing with Attorney General Gregoire.

The attorney general's identity theft experts in consumer resource centers statewide can help refer you to the proper authorities and will assist victims with referrals, problems with credit reporting and collections. Consumer resource centers can be reached at (800) 551-4636.

Details of this new law are available on the Attorney General's Office Web site:
www.wa.gov/ago/consumer/idtheft.

Fair Compensation

Passage of Initiative 732 guaranteed cost-of-living increases for state-funded teachers. Teachers and state employees got the same 3.7 percent increase in July. The amount of the 2002 raise has not yet been determined. Also, state employees will get a real pay raise because there was not an increase in their health insurance co-pay.

Health Care

The state will spend \$1 billion more on health services for low-income residents and state workers than during the last budget cycle. That's about a 30 percent increase in total health care spending. The Legislature stayed within Initiative 601's spending cap in several ways:

- *Increased state worker contributions.* State workers, K-12 and higher-ed employees will pay a larger portion of their total health insurance premiums. The increase will be from 6 percent to 8 percent next year and 10 percent the following year.
- *Reduced Basic Health Plan enrollment and increased cost sharing.* Next year 8,200 fewer new enrollees will be allowed on the Basic Health Plan. Although this will be a \$32 million savings to taxpayers, many who need it will not be able to enroll. This adjustment does not affect existing plan members.

More Access to Certain Health Services

- *Expands women's health care.* Women younger than 65 who have been diagnosed with breast or cervical cancer will now be eligible for treatment through Medicaid with federal matching funds of 65 percent.
- *Children's immunizations.* Recommended childhood immunizations are currently provided at no cost to all children through the age of 5. Ten million dollars will cover the costs of the new pneumococcal conjugate vaccine. This expensive vaccine is very cost effective in preventing meningitis, middle-ear, blood-stream and other infections.
- *CHIP expansion.* Three million more in state dollars will expand enrollment in the Children's Health Insurance Program from 4,200 to almost 7,000 children. Families with incomes up to 250 percent of the federal poverty level (up to \$3,553 a month for a family of four) are eligible.
- *Dental health for children.* Too many children don't receive preventative care because of a shortage of dentists. Dental hygienists will be able to provide sealants to low-income children in schools.



- *The no-frills budget protects health care and other social services.* Homecare worker wages are increased and medically indigent, adult dental and vision, chore and adult day health programs are funded.

Contractors and Consumer Protection

My committee has worked for several years to address the increasing complaints about contractors. Senate Bill 5101 passed this year with the active support of the contractors. They recognize the need for additional protections from those who give their industry a bad name. Most consumers who hire contractors for homebuilding, remodeling or repairs are satisfied with the work. But thousands each year find themselves with uncompleted jobs or liens placed against their property for unpaid materials bills.



Chair Prentice asks a question during a committee hearing.

Currently, a consumer's major protection is the contractors' bond or surety. But bond and insurance requirements had not changed since 1983. The \$4,000 bond for specialty contractors and \$6,000 bond for general contractors didn't always cover the contractor's debts that were left behind. Materials suppliers received payment from the bond before consumers. This bill provides more bond money for restitution, sets aside funds to reimburse homeowners, and provides the Department of Labor & Industries with additional authority to collect the penalties and fines issued to contractors.

L&I's contractor registration Web site, www.lni.wa.gov/scs/contractors, offers advice for consumers who may be hiring a contractor or remodeler. Information also is available by calling (800) 647-098

Ergonomics

Ergonomics is the science and practice of designing jobs and workplaces to match the capabilities and limitations of our bodies. The Department of Labor & Industries' workplace ergonomics rule has staggered compliance dates beginning in 2003. Employers will be required to protect their employees from work-related injuries such as back strain, tendonitis and carpal tunnel syndrome, many of which are preventable.

The first of Labor & Industries workshops to assist employers and employees with the ergonomics rule is in our area. It will be Thursday, Aug. 23 from 6 - 8 pm at the Renton Technical College, Room H-103, 3000 N.E. Fourth Street; Renton. Visit the ergonomics Web site: www.lni.wa.gov/wisha/ergo or call (206) 281-5533 for more information.

Redistricting

Every 10 years, each state redraws legislative and congressional district boundaries to accommodate population shifts and keep districts equal in population.

A five-member bipartisan Redistricting Commission will use the 2000 census data to create and submit a redistricting plan to the Legislature by Jan.1.

The recent census indicates a major shift in the population of King County, so many of you could be represented by a different senator from a different district. We might all end up with a different district number!

For further information, call the Redistricting Commission's office in Olympia at (360) 586-9000 or visit www.redistricting.wa.gov on the Internet.

Senate Pages

It is always a pleasure to sponsor hometown students as Senate pages. Nahid Amirchoupani, Juliana Mottola, Callie Dahmen and Sarah Vacanti from Saint Anthony's School; and Anh Nguyen

from Highline High School were our pages this year. For more information on the page program, contact my office or visit www.leg.wa.gov/common/kids/default.htm.



Nahid Amirchoupani



Juliana Mottola



Callie Dahman



Sarah Vacanti



Anh Nguyen

